

# Sales is a numbers game...Or is it?

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Numbers and data have always been a part of the sales world and any decent Sales Executive can crunch numbers, spin numbers, see trends, analyze and make decisions based on numbers. Sales Executives are always trying to determine what activities in what volume will lead to a sale. We look at how many dials needed to reach a contact, how many contacts to get to an appointment and how many appointments to get to a sale. We look at close ratios, average dollars per deal, sales costs – we use funnel and pipeline management to analyze where a sales person is weak or strong, where he is dropping the ball or at point in the sales cycle she needs to be coached. And then there is forecasting, territory analysis, marketing effectiveness, setting quotas, sales compensation and the list goes on.

In sales leadership our lives are driven by numbers. And with the assistance of sales enablement tools and big data it seems the term “Sales is a numbers game” has become even more of a mantra for us. And we have the dashboards, reports and statistics to prove it. But what does the data and the tools really prove? The over-weighted focus on numbers, tools, and analysis has become a distraction and obsession away from what is really important.

This obsession with numbers and yes, it has reached an obsession – has led us to a false sense of security and dependence on numbers. This drive and focus on numbers creates this need for more; more contacts, more leads, and more activity believing that these things are indefinite – but the bottom line is they are not. The reality is activity, contacts and leads are a finite number. This obsession for more has created sales enablement tools that not only help with the collection and analysis of data but creating the ability to do more activity. All promising to ensure your team(s) will hit their quota resulting in more revenue – and with all the data, all the analysis and all the sales enablement tools promising to deliver more, really where are we? What the real statistics show is that we are either getting worse at setting quotas and forecasting business or this obsession with data and activities is not getting the results we need.

Here are some stats to chew on; over the past 4 years sales quotas have risen yet the percentage of sales reps making quotas has dropped 25 percent. More than 42 percent of companies reported that less than 50 percent of reps were meeting or exceeding their quota (Bridge Group). 54 percent of sales reps can't access decision makers and I've even seen early numbers for 2013 stating that quota attainment is dropping into the low 40 percentile.

If Sales is truly a numbers game and we have all of this technology to drive more activity, slice dice and analyze, pinpoint where the sales rep needs to focus, when the sales manager should intervene, how marketing can be more effective. Then why is the percentage of sales people making quotas dropping, why are fewer sales reps getting through to decision makers, why do 51% of deals forecasted never close?

One concept today is 80% of the buying process is done before the customer even engages a sales rep – and the decision is pretty much made before the sales rep gains access. This is due to the access of information and the customer’s willingness to educate themselves on your product, solution, and company, determining pretty quickly who they are going to consider. All the number crunching in the world isn’t going to help. More than ever before sales reps have one chance, one brief chance to progress the deal and drive it to close. If indeed 80 percent of the buying process is done before decision makers engage a sales rep is real – then sales processes must be executed with precision and brilliance providing the decision maker with the insight and influence needed to choose you, your product, your solution, your company!

Selling is more complex then ever – the layers needed to penetrate organizations are more complex then just 5 years ago, even 3 years. If you’re coaching your sales teams with ideas that worked even a few years ago then you’re no help. The new norm for sales is creativity, innovation and intelligent selling. Sales reps must show up with executive presence, strategic thinking skills, market intellect, have social media prowess and presentation skills that educate, engage and wow the customer. While you’ve been crunching numbers trying to figure out how to get your sales people to “do more activity” sales has been evolving. It has become a game of intellect, psychology and integrity.

So push away from the reports, stop staring at the dashboard and get away from the spreadsheet. Start looking at the real world of sales today...We have the technology to generate the numbers – what we need now is sales leaders who get it and know how to integrate the data with complex sales competencies and the human aspect of selling.

Sales in not a numbers game, but yes, numbers will always be part of the sales game...

## About Skyline Group

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